

**Distribution:**  
Sworn Personnel: X  
Civilian Personnel: X  
NECC: X

**P & P#** 4.01  
**Adopted** 09/04/90  
**Revised** 04/12/05

**Chapter 4**  
**Records Division**

**POLICY AND PROCEDURE**  
**POLICE MEDIA RELATIONS**

I. **PURPOSE:**

The Newtown Department of Police Services must have the support of the community to be successful. Establishing and maintaining an effective relationship with the news media is crucial to accomplishing this goal. This media relation's policy establishes guidelines regarding media relations and the release of information to the public through the news media. In addition, this policy is intended to insure that no information is released to the media that would interfere with a person's constitutional rights to a fair trial, and due process of law.

II. **POLICY:**

No employee shall release any information that would jeopardize an active investigation, prejudice an accused person's right to a fair trial, or violate the law. It shall be the policy of this agency to cooperate with the news media and to maintain an atmosphere of open communication. A positive working relationship with the media is mutually beneficial. To this end, information shall be released to the news media in an impartial, accurate and timely fashion. It shall be the responsibility of each employee to abide by this philosophy of cooperation.

III. **RESPONSIBILITIES IN RELEASING INFORMATION:**

It is ultimately the responsibility of the Chief of Police to release information to the public. That responsibility may be delegated to the following personnel:

- A. Supervisors of the shift or the Public Information Officer (PIO), if established. The Supervisor of the shift or the PIO will be the primary contact for the news media on most routine scenes and investigations.
- B. Supervisors with responsibility for a specific high profile case or incident may be the secondary contact for the news media in the absence of the Chief of Police.
- C. Other employees who the Chief of Police or his designee may direct to respond to media inquiries.
- D. All officers who in the course of their routine duties, fill out news releases or respond to media inquiries as required within this policy.

IV. **ORGANIZATION OF PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE OR FUNCTION**

The media relation's function shall support the agency and its personnel in matters involving the news media. To accomplish this, the supervisor of the shift shall be available during normal business hours and be available at critical incidents provided that it does not adversely distract from the duties and responsibilities of the supervisor. The shift commander shall be responsible for ensuring that the Chief of Police is informed through the chain of command of major incidents and all other events that may generate significant media interest.

V. PROCEDURES:

A. Media Inquiries

This agency shall respond to all media inquiries in a timely and professional manner. During normal business hours, media inquiries shall be directed to the Supervisor. On scene verbal "news releases" should be made by the officer in charge of the scene after careful consideration of what information is going to be released.

B. Interviews

Supervisors shall be responsible for assisting the news media by conducting interviews himself or herself or coordinating interviews with other qualified agency personnel. Employees contacted directly by the media shall notify the Supervisor of any interview requests. All conversations with members of the news media should be considered "on the record" and subject to being quoted. In matters that generate great media interest, the Chief of Police will be notified through the Chain of Command to assist in the interview requests.

C. News Releases

News releases shall be written and disseminated to the media on all matters that would interest the community and on all notable criminal/motor vehicle accident investigations. News releases will be disseminated to agency employees on major incidents and events of community interest or concern.

A supervisor must approve all written news releases and initial each accepted news release before it is disseminated. All news release shall be written prior to an officer leaving his or her assigned shift except when given permission by a supervisor. Supervisors will closely monitor officers completing news releases and supervisors will have discretion on the deviation from fulfilling this requirement. News releases must be accurate and contain the necessary readable information.

Typically, news releases will be written for routine criminal investigations such as burglary and larceny investigations, all criminal and custodial motor vehicle arrests, criminal mischief type investigations, etc. Ongoing criminal investigations such as drug investigations, which if released to the public, would jeopardize the integrity of the investigation, are exempt from this section. Supervisors will make the final determination on all matters relating to the completing of and dissemination of news releases.

#### D. News Conferences

News conferences shall be held only in connection with major events of concern to the community and will be coordinated through the office of Chief of Police.

#### E. Access to Crime Scenes and Critical Incidents

Agency personnel shall be courteous to news media representatives at crime and critical incident scenes.

At such scenes, agency personnel shall ensure that the media respect the established perimeter. Members of the media shall receive no more or less access to an incident scene than members of the general public.

The media, with approval of the scene commander, may be given closer access to a crime scene or accident scene, to the degree that it does not interfere with law enforcement operations.

No member of this agency shall prohibit the media from its news gathering practices, including photography and interviews, while outside the established perimeter.

News media representatives shall not be prevented from access to any area **solely** because of the possibility of their injury or death. If this is the **only** consideration, the scene commander shall advise the media representative of the danger and allow the media representative to make the decision to enter on his or her own volition. Access to any crime scene or any scene should never interfere with official law enforcement operations and functions. On scene commanders should establish areas designated for news media representatives and if possible assign an officer to that area.

Only the scene commander shall release information to the news media at crime and critical incident scenes.

At critical incident scenes, the scene commander shall establish a media briefing area as close to the scene as safety and operational requirements allow.

At critical incident scenes, members of the agency shall work in close cooperation with the media to ensure that live broadcasts do not disclose any information that could endanger law enforcement personnel or the general public.

#### F. Public Records

This agency and its members shall abide by all local, state, and federal laws governing the release of public records.

#### G. Access to Suspects

No member of this agency shall pose any suspect or accused person in custody or make him or her available for media interviews.

#### H. Joint Investigations or Operations Involving Another Agency

In a multi-jurisdictional investigation, the lead investigative agency is responsible for providing or coordinating the release of public information. The designee for the lead agency should share that information with all involved agencies in advance of public dissemination.

### VI. INFORMATION RELEASE GUIDELINES

The release of information is subject to restrictions placed by applicable local, state, and federal laws. No member of this agency shall release any information that would hamper the successful conclusion of an investigation or jeopardize the safety of affected persons.

A. Agency members can release the following information:

- Basic information about victims, except as excluded by law
- Description of suspects
- Basic description of weapons and vehicles used.
- Basic description of stolen items
- Basic description of injuries and condition of victims
- The name, age, address, and other basic information about arrestees and the charges against them with a brief summary of events (i. e. location & time of arrest, brief method of investigative steps)
- Booking photographs (with permission from a supervisor only)
- Basic information about a crime or incident
- Length of investigation and name of officer in charge of investigation

B. Agency members shall not release the following information:

- Names, addresses, and any other information that would identify the victim of a sex offense, child abuse, or any other crime where the privacy of the victim is protected by law.
- Names, addresses, and basic information about juvenile arrestees, as governed by state law
- Active criminal investigative information, active criminal intelligence information, and surveillance techniques
- Names of informants and information provided by them
- Supplemental or investigative reports until such time as the case is closed or a supervisor deems it permissible
- Grand jury testimony and proceedings
- Active internal affairs investigations, as governed by state law

- Names of witnesses or witnesses who can positively identify a suspect, unless required by state law
- The identity of critically injured or deceased persons prior to notification of next-of-kin.
- Home address, telephone numbers, and familial information of law enforcement personnel
- Names of undercover personnel
- Any other information that could jeopardize the successful conclusion of an investigative and prosecution
- Any other information prohibited by state law from public disclosure
- Information about valuable items not stolen
- Conjecture about suspects or fugitives
- Misleading or false information
- Any information that could only be known to the guilty party
- Comments about the character or reputation of the defendant
- Results of any examinations or test conducted prior to trial

VII. MEDIA RIDE-ALONGS:

Media ride-alongs allow members of the media to accompany law enforcement officers as they perform their duties. Ride-alongs for the media will only occur with the advance notice to and permission from the Chief of Police or Captain. Employees shall not permit members of the media to accompany them onto private property nor shall they assist in securing permission for access from property owners.

VIII. TRAINING:

This agency is committed to providing proper training for its public information officer, supervisors, line officers, and other personnel who may interact with the media.

IX. ETHICS:

It is the policy of this agency to treat members of the media professionally and ethically. It is expected that the media will respond in a like manner and follow ethical guidelines established by their profession. Members of this agency who believe they were treated unethically should contact their police supervisor.

X. MEETINGS WITH THE MEDIA:

Reaffirming this agency's commitment to positive media relations, the Chief of Police shall meet on a regular basis with media representatives to discuss issues of mutual interest or concern. Proposed or anticipated changes in department policy or procedures dealing with the media also shall be addressed at this time.

XI. PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS :

This agency is committed to ensuring the media relations function is part of mutual aid support that law enforcement agencies provide to each other. To that end, this agency shall participate in, whenever possible, and support professional associations and organizations composed of media relation specialists from other public and private agencies.

XII. LIVE COVERAGE AGREEMENTS:

Live coverage agreements establish voluntary guidelines for the broadcast of live pictures or information emanating from critical incident scenes such as hostage situations, barricaded subjects, and similar ongoing crises. This agency supports the creation, implementation, and use of such agreements.

XIII. MEDIA CREDENTIALS:

This agency acknowledges representatives from recognized media organizations who carry and/or display photographic identification issued by their employer.

XIV. ALTERNATIVE METHODS TO DISSEMINATE INFORMATION:

It is the policy of this agency to pursue alternative methods of disseminating information directly to the public. These may include community newsletters, government access cable television shows, web sites, public appearances by agency members, public area bulletin boards, and any other media means.

As such, the faxing of news releases will be accomplished in the following manner:

1. **Routine Requests- Routine requests for faxing will occur between 8:30 AM and 9:30 AM Monday through Friday. The news media representative can speak with the Executive Assistant who will review the new release file and fax all appropriate news releases.**
2. **Extra-Ordinary Event Requests-Often times, a news worthy event will generate statewide media interest. The shift supervisors will handle any request for this type of event, including the faxing of the news release.**